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DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR AND HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
AND WELFARE APPROPRIATIONS FOR 1962

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HEARINGS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EIGHTY-SEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR AND HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND  
WELFARE AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS

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Comments on the Present Condition of American Education

Printed for the use of the Committee on Appropriations



FROM YOUR CONGRESSMAN  
JOHN E. FOGARTY  
SECOND DISTRICT, RHODE ISLAND

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(II)

## COMMITTEE NOTE

Due to printing schedules it was not possible to print the following statement of the Commissioner of Education in the hearings volume "Department of Health, Education, and Welfare—Part I (exclusive of Public Health Service)." The following excerpt from pages 339 and 340 of that volume includes the discussion that occasioned the submission of the Commissioner's statement:

Mr. FOGARTY. Approximately 3 years ago Admiral Rickover appeared before the full Committee on Appropriations.

Dr. McMURRIN. Yes.

Mr. FOGARTY. It was after a trip he had just made to Russia. I was there and did not know he was going to talk on education; I thought he was going to talk on atomic energy. But he apparently spent most of his time on his trip to Russia looking into their educational facilities and what they are doing in education. He came back and leveled quite a blistering attack on the Office of Education, the people in it, and everyone concerned.

I asked Dr. Derthick if he would read the testimony and make a report to us. The two reports have been printed as separate documents. I do not know whether you have had an opportunity of reading both.

Dr. McMURRIN. I have read them, sir.

Mr. FOGARTY. You have read Rickover's statement and Dr. Derthick's?

Dr. McMURRIN. I must say that I have not studied them with great care, but I have read both of them from cover to cover.

### DR. M'MURRIN'S STATEMENT ON ADMIRAL RICKOVER'S TESTIMONY

Mr. FOGARTY. Well, I think that is a very controversial subject. So I think the only fair way of treating you would be to give you an opportunity of getting up a statement, as I did Dr. Derthick. If you think Admiral Rickover was right in some respects, all right. If you think Dr. Derthick was right in some respects, you might say so. Would you want that opportunity or not?

Dr. McMURRIN. I would be very pleased with that opportunity, sir. Do you have in mind submitting a somewhat lengthy statement, as they did?

Mr. FOGARTY. I will leave it up to you. We would like a rather comprehensive report. So you submit whatever report you think is appropriate.

Dr. McMURRIN. I will be very happy to do so.

# **DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR AND HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE APPROPRIATIONS FOR 1962**

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**MAY 8, 1961**

## **COMMENTS ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF AMERICAN EDUCATION**

**(BY STERLING M. M'MURRIN, U.S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION,  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE)**

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your gracious invitation to present for your committee's record a statement on the present condition and prospects of American education. This is a most appropriate time for such a statement, as there is now a growing recognition of the crucial importance of education to the Nation and a realization that the character and quality of our educational institutions are quite properly the urgent concern of the Congress.

Without question, one of our greatest assets in the effort to improve our educational establishment is the intense interest in education that presently pervades the Nation, an interest that is involving countless persons from every vocation and profession in a general discussion of the ends of education and the ways of achieving them. Fortunately there is developing among us that spirit of genuine criticism that is always an essential ingredient of institutional and civic improvement.

The character of this discussion and criticism indicates that in the matter of education we are now facing a crisis of conscience and that collectively we are experiencing a sense of national guilt. This consciousness of guilt grows out of the realization that in general we have failed to establish and maintain an educational program of the quality of which we are capable and which is now essential to the well-being of all our people taken individually and to the achievement of the full enrichment of our culture and the strength of our Nation. There is an increasing concern for our failure to fully cultivate the talents and capacities of our people and a realization that we are not adequately satisfying the demands that our national life now properly and necessarily places upon the educational process. We cannot deny that today we would command far more knowledge and have far more creativity, civic character, and national strength if our schools generally had been more rigorous in their intellectual discipline and had been more adequately structured to the needs of our society. We have with lavish prodigality wasted the talent and energy of countless persons who should have been educated at higher levels of skills and knowledge, and whose education would have been a substantial asset to a nation that makes an ever-increasing demand for high competence in its people.

In referring to the demands placed upon education by our national life, I do not mean to recommend that we educate toward narrow nationalistic political ends or for the achievement of cultural parochialism and isolation. Far from it. One of our great needs as a nation is the cultivation of a genuine cosmopolitanism, a world-mindedness that will assure us not only an understanding and appreciation of other cultures, but even an actual participation in them. Without the perspective that such a sophistication would afford, we cannot hope to satisfy the obligation of world leadership that history has conferred upon us.

Nor is this a proposal that we emulate the totalitarian states in regimenting and manipulating the potential manpower of our Nation. Nothing could compensate for the loss of freedom that such a procedure would entail, and perhaps nothing could fill the breach that would thereby be made in the foundations of our democracy. The strength of a democratic society can be guaranteed only by a genuine individualism that encourages and protects independence in thought and action. Too often we have been so anxious to accommodate the individual painlessly to his social environment that we have seriously endangered this individualism. But if we are to build full strength into our Nation we must invest the individual with a sense of civic purpose and dedication and cultivate in him the internal intellectual and moral discipline requisite to the role of an intelligent citizen in a free society.

Certainly now in the presence of great peril, not only to our own Nation but to the entire free world, we must avoid confusion in our educational program as in the administration of public affairs generally. There must be in education as elsewhere a supreme effort through information, counsel, encouragement, thoughtful planning, and material assistance to direct the Nation's energies and abilities in the common interest.

Under the stress of adverse world conditions our people are seeking a clear definition of what we have come to call the national goals. For a society that has traditionally concerned itself primarily with the individual and his interests, this is not an easy task. But we can be very sure that unless our educational program at all levels takes careful cognizance of these goals they will not be realized. As our society becomes more complex, with increasing intercommunication, urbanization, and industrialization, and as the Nation assumes a larger role of leadership in the free world, and as the body of available knowledge in all fields continues to expand, the task of education will become immeasurably greater and our schools, colleges, and universities will assume a new importance in both domestic and international affairs.

It is clear that we must achieve broad national perspectives on educational purposes to insure that our educational program develops in a direction commensurate with this increased responsibility. It is here that the Federal Government must play an important role in providing sound leadership as well as material support. But this does not mean that we should in any way depart from the principle and practice of local and State determination and control of our educational institutions, for much of the strength of American education, and indeed of American society generally, is the product of that tradition.

In urging that our education more adequately satisfy our changing social needs, I do not mean to propose that every specific task in our complex social order be allowed to dictate the curriculum of our schools, whether public or private, academic or vocational, elementary or advanced. Already we are in some difficulty at every level, because in our effort to relate education effectively to the lives of the students we have too often divided and splintered until far too much of our energy is dissipated on unrewarding peripheral detail or trivial matters that deserve no place in the economy of a serious formal education. An intensive mastery of fundamental principles and techniques that will have general theoretical application or practical usefulness should replace the not infrequent expansiveness that has made the curriculum attractive and interesting, but sometimes somewhat superficial. It is education in the most basic sense, whether it be in the humanities, the social or natural sciences, in technology or the professions, that will be most rewarding to the individual and at the same time will best satisfy the needs of our society in providing adequate manpower for our trades and professions and in guaranteeing the expansion of knowledge and the disciplined habits of mind that are so crucial to the well-being of our people.

There is a sense in which American education seems destined to become a major testing ground for democracy, for it is a basic assumption of the democratic political ideal that there is a coincidence of what is good for the individual with what is good for society as a whole. It is the faith of a free democratic society that when the good of the individual is intelligently pursued, the well-being of the total social order is in some way enhanced. The task facing the leaders of American education is to so organize and administer our educational institutions that the best interests of every individual will be served and that this process will at the same time contribute to the fundamental quality of our culture and add genuine strength to our national character. We must make sure that the maximum cultivation of the individual's intellectual, moral, artistic, and spiritual capacities that makes of him a genuinely free person yields also the protection and perpetuation of those institutions that are essential to a free society.

Here two things should be kept foremost in our thinking. First, that the total education of an individual is a task in which all of our social institutions participate. The schools should not be expected to do everything. Their primary task is the achievement and dissemination of knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect. It is only when this task is firmly established as the central purpose of a school that it will produce effectively those results in personal and civic character that we rightly expect of it.

Secondly, we must guard against the tendency to suppose that our national well-being is served primarily by advances in technology, however important and timely these may be. Knowledge is of value for its own sake as well as for its uses, and unless the sciences are supported in their own right the capital of knowledge on which our technology is nourished will surely diminish. And the social sciences and the humanities and fine arts are as important to the quality of our culture and eventually to the strength of our Nation as are engineering and the physical sciences, upon which now so much obviously depends. The study of politics, history, and philosophy is fundamental to our cultural life, and no nation can achieve a lasting strength unless its character is expressed in great literature, art, and music.

We should not fear that a more effective accommodation of education to social needs and national goals must destroy the freedom and individual initiative and creativity of our people. On the contrary, countless persons would thereby find a new freedom, for they would be brought into the educational process on a higher level, and through institutions designed for their peculiar abilities on the one hand and the needs of our social and economic order on the other.

It is entirely obvious, of course, that we cannot now be satisfied with any educational endeavor that is not genuinely committed to the highest standards of which we are capable. Whatever may be the disposition of some individuals, the Nation cannot afford anything less than is now so commonly called the pursuit of excellence. At every step of the educational ladder we must make those demands for achievement that will call forth the full capabilities of every student.

I believe that we are guilty, and that we know that we are guilty, of often following a path of inordinate ease and comfort in our educational policy and practice. And we are suddenly aware that all too often we have sacrificed excellence to a large measure of mediocrity, because we have been unwilling to pay the price that excellence demands—rigor, discipline, and genuinely hard work.

Like so many other departments of our society and culture, our educational establishment at many points is comfortable and soft. At times we have been far too willing to entertain and to tolerate when we should have disciplined, directed, and inspired—inspired by great teaching, of the type that moves the mind to a genuine love of knowledge and to an insatiable demand to possess and to create it; directed by wisdom that grasps the proper ends of learning, profound wisdom that is sensitive to whatever is most precious to the human soul, whatever is most worthy of human endeavor; and disciplined by that internal discipline whereby a genuinely moral person orders his life, determines the means appropriate to his ends, and achieves a proper integration of his intellect and affections.

To the extent that we have failed to challenge the full capabilities of our students, from kindergarten through graduate school, we have betrayed the democratic ideal that is so precious to us. The meaning of democracy in education is not found in a dead-leveling process that attempts to conform all men to a simple equality. We believe not that all men are of equal capacity, but that all are entitled to the opportunity to develop fully such capacities as they have. We combine this with a belief in the inherent dignity of the individual person. These are powerful ideas with tremendous implications. They mean, certainly, that the creative artist, the professional person, and the artisan alike deserve the full esteem of their fellow men and that every man is entitled to his measure of self-respect who is doing his best in a vocation that contributes to the total life of our society.

When we demand in our schools and elsewhere something less than the individual is capable of doing, we rob him of his self-respect and we corrupt our most basic ideals. We have been too often guilty on this count, and our schools must bear a large measure of responsibility for that guilt.

It is not a proper reply to say that our children learn more now than they did 50 years ago. No doubt this is true, for more knowl-

edge is now available. But measurable increases in the amount of knowledge gained in the course of a year, while important, are beside the point. Educational excellence, as a goal, is never realized. It is neither visible nor tangible. Perhaps it is not, strictly speaking, a goal at all, but an attitude that informs the total process of education. In any event, we can approach excellence in education only by demanding of all—administrators, teachers, students, and the general public—all that they are capable of achieving. If ever in the past there were reason for asking less, there is none now, for our times are perilous and will accept no less.

We have not lacked great teaching, and we may be grateful for the innumerable highly qualified and dedicated teachers who have provided it. Their contribution to our society is immeasurable. But the quality of teaching, generally, is lower by far than it should be, and lower, too, than it need be. It is here that we confront our greatest failure in matters pertaining to education. That failure consists of a stubborn refusal by our society to commit to the teaching profession a large enough measure of the best that we have in human resources. The quality of teaching is our basic educational problem. It will not be solved until all of our teachers have the competence that is now enjoyed by those whom we all recognize for their great and inspiring work in our classrooms, seminars, and laboratories.

The identification and education of teachers for our schools is now a matter of major concern for the Nation. It is a national tragedy that the generality of our teachers are not fully qualified to assume the burden of responsibility that we must place upon them in the future. Many are lacking the native talent demanded by the art of teaching. Others in large numbers are inadequately prepared by general education or education in their teaching specialties. The responsibility for this rests partially upon our society as a whole, for it has failed to raise the teaching profession to that level of stature and esteem that would make it attractive to highly talented people in numbers adequate to fully satisfy the demand for qualified teaching personnel, and our public leaders have not insisted that our colleges and universities devote their best efforts to the education of teachers.

It would be unwise to suppose that this predicament of the teaching profession is due simply to inadequate salaries for teachers, even though the problem will never be solved until the average salary level of the profession is made competitive with that of other employed professions. It is due in part at least to the fact that the education of prospective teachers in our society has quite commonly failed to fully challenge the intellectual abilities and creative talents of the more capable segment of our students. Persons of high ability look to a profession that demands rigorous preparation and high competence. The range of students entering our professional education schools is far too wide for the good of our Nation. It encompasses many who enjoy the highest capabilities, but also many who are near failures in any scholastic endeavor.

In the future every effort must be made to identify persons of high intellectual competence and talent in the art of teaching and to attract them to the teaching profession. And the standards of our colleges of education must be raised to exclude those who do not have real promise. The finest education must be made available to those who qualify: first, a genuine and rigorous liberal education in the full

sense of that word, an education in the arts and the sciences of the kind that frees the mind, that acquaints it with at least the rudiments of the world's basic knowledge, and cultivates critical and creative intelligence. To insure this kind of education, the education school must become a part of the mainstream of the intellectual life of our universities. The education of teachers is properly the task of the entire faculty, not simply of those who specialize in the teaching art and its related sciences.

It is a national scandal that large numbers of our teachers are inadequately prepared in the subject matter that they teach. We should not be satisfied until this situation is entirely corrected, as its perpetuation is the surest guarantee of mediocrity in the classroom. There will never be a substitute for a teacher's full mastery of his subject.

Finally, education in the art of teaching has too commonly been narrowly conceived in terms of psychological studies descriptive of the learning process. Teaching is an art that must be rooted in the entire gamut of the behavioral sciences as well as in psychology, involving such disciplines as sociology, descriptive ethics, and cultural anthropology. But far more than this, even a simple comprehension of the proper aims of education involves necessarily an intimate knowledge of the value structure of the culture and entails some acquaintance with the essentials of its intellectual and moral tradition. For the meaning of education is found in part in the great task of understanding, appreciating, criticizing, and perpetuating the culture of which we are a part and in which are lodged our value traditions and commitments. To put it briefly, there is no easy road in the preparation of teachers of the kind that we must now guarantee our schools. Our society will make heavy demands upon them in the future.

Mr. Chairman, we may take much satisfaction in the fact that American education has firm foundations and has cultivated numerous precious virtues and has made solid and notable gains. That many of our schools at all levels are institutions of outstanding quality is entirely obvious. And there are instances among them of surpassing excellence. Our primary asset is the firm tradition of freedom that is the foundation of our intellectual life and that unfailingly supports the open and uninhibited quest for knowledge that generally characterizes our schools and colleges. And our most important advance, of course, has been the achievement and implementation of a democratic ideal in education. We have virtually effected a general literacy and have created abundant opportunities for advanced education on many levels and in a variety of directions. In the matter of quantity we have done well. And although our quality often leaves much to be desired, we must turn a deaf ear to those reactionaries among us who are forever insisting that we abandon our democratic ideal and model our education on the aristocratic patterns of some European nations. There can be no turning back from what has been a high and sacred purpose. We must dedicate ourselves to the improvement of our intellectual life within the context of an educational philosophy that is native to our culture and appropriate to the ends that have been defined by our democratic commitment.

The real values of the modern American curriculum are another notable instance of our educational achievement. But it is not necessary to devote precious time and energy to trivial studies and

activities to demonstrate our concern for the student as well as for the subject or to prove our emancipation from the classical European education. It is not necessary to abandon genuine learning just because we have discovered that schools should be congenial to students as well as to books, information, and ideas. We have done well to encourage broad general education. But it is wise to remember that one cannot know anything in general without knowing something in particular. Nor, as I have already urged, is it a demand of our democratic ideal that we direct our educational effort so commonly toward average talent and intellectual capacity and thereby involve our Nation in mediocrity while betraying countless numbers of persons of high intelligence and creative ability.

We are progressing well on many fronts, in educational research and experimentation, for instance, where notable achievements are becoming common, and in the upgrading and updating of the basic courses of our secondary schools, where important work is being done in the sciences and must be done in the social and humanistic studies. And in our graduate work and research seminars and laboratories great advances are being made in the extension of knowledge on all fronts. Moreover, progress is being made in adult and vocational education, areas of immense importance to a democratic society. The increased involvement of the Federal Government in educational matters, as evidenced, for instance, by the National Defense Education Act of 1958, has given to American education a new strength and a new promise of future accomplishments. The President's legislative proposals now before the Congress would add immeasurably to that strength and promise.

We have made real gains—great gains, of which we can be justly proud. It is a pride in which all our people may share, just as they must all share the responsibilities for our educational failures. But now the hour is late and we must move ahead with an even more firm resolve and dedication.

There is a sense in which our crisis in education may be said to have a spiritual dimension in that it relates to the uncertainties and anxieties that now so frequently characterize our people in their quest for meaningful and purposeful endeavor. Education is an important bearer of the spiritual life as this is broadly conceived as a life of purpose and value. It is a creator, protector, critic, and continuator of those values that mark our culture in its higher reaches, that impart to it its distinguishing character and determine in large measure what will be precious to the individual and worth the price of his commitment and pursuit. It is inevitable, therefore, that any radical disturbance or confusion in our educational life reflects the condition of our society and culture at their very center and that the resolution of major educational difficulties will affect with utmost importance the spiritual foundations of our Nation.

There are perhaps two things more, Mr. Chairman, to which I would like to draw your attention. First is the genuineness of our commitment to education. It would seem initially that there is no justification for questioning that commitment. The achievement of a general literacy would alone testify to the seriousness of our educational enterprise, to say nothing of our obvious accomplishments in many directions and at every level of the educational process. Nevertheless it should be equally obvious that our commitment is not

what we would like to believe it to be, that it has proved inadequate to guarantee our full success in the tasks that are upon us, and that we are not yet willing to invest in education that measure of our resources that will give us such a guarantee.

By resources, of course, I do not mean simply financial resources. It is too characteristic of us to assume that money will solve all of our problems—money for more buildings, more research equipment, more scholarships and fellowships, more teachers, and higher salaries. Money will solve no problems whatsoever without talent, energy, creative initiative, inspiration, and plain hard work. But our problems will not be solved without more money, and far more, than is now being invested in our educational establishment. They will not be solved without those student loans, fellowships, and higher salaries. If we continue to pay only the price of second- and third-class education we will deserve to suffer the comparative decline of our intellectual life that will inevitably be upon us. If we intend to remain in the first rank of intellectual achievement, of scholarly and scientific and technological advancement, we must accept the fact that a much larger share of our national income than the allowance now made must be invested in education.

But by resources I refer also and especially to those human resources already named, resources that are so commonly misdirected or left unidentified or uncultivated and therefore wasted—wasted both for society and the individuals who possess them. What achievements would not be possible to us, and to what heights could we not aspire if we were to fit our educational patterns to the real abilities of our people, from the preschool age through secondary schools, vocational and technological institutes, colleges and universities, and graduate schools.

If our commitment to education were what we like to think it is, we would move rapidly and more directly toward the expenditure of our resources on it for the high rewards that this would bring. The Soviet Union has here set for us an important example, the example of a generous investment in education. I do not suppose for a moment that the generality of Russian people are more genuinely devoted to education than are we. But those few who determine Soviet public policy have invested a remarkably large proportion of their nation's resources in education and they are reaping a high return on their investment. Let us not make such decisions in terms of the affairs of other nations; but also let us not live indefinitely in ease and luxury while convincing ourselves that we cannot afford to pay the price in human energy and talent to achieve the best education of which we are intellectually and spiritually capable.

There is a second aspect of our educational predicament that deserves notice. I refer to our growing sense of failure, of having been wrong in something of utter importance where we should have been right. No doubt it is healthy to recognize and frankly admit our errors. But for a nation to accuse itself, as ours is now doing, of having erred fundamentally in a matter central not only to its well-being but to its very security, and erred where error was by no means inevitable and might well have been avoided—this is a matter of the greatest moment. We in America are accustomed to assume that whatever temporary ups and downs of our fortunes and whatever occasional criticisms from our conscience may be our lot, our collec-

tive fate is secure in the hands of a benevolent God or at least under the dominion of an encompassing providence, and that with us or without us our Nation and our culture will be preserved and will move forward inevitably. We are accustomed to the belief that we are on the side of righteousness and whatever our individual wisdom and effort, righteousness will prevail.

But it is evident to us now, and our national spirit is affected by this evidence, that if it is true that we are on the side of righteousness it is yet not inconceivable that we may fail and fail profoundly and that righteousness may fail with us.

A generation ago the eminent philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, dramatically and with great prescience insisted on the profound danger of failure in education. His words have been quoted often in recent years, but they are no less important for that:

When one considers in its length and in its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage. In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute, the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, not all your wit, not all your victories on land or at sea, can move back the finger of fate. Today we maintain ourselves. Tomorrow science will have moved forward yet one more step, and there will be no appeal from the judgment which will then be pronounced on the uneducated.

The facts become increasingly plain. The handwriting on the wall is there for all to read. If the United States is to continue to move forward and to make its proper contribution to its children and to the world, its people must be willing to dedicate a much larger share than ever before of their human and material resources to the support of education. There is no point in searching for an alternative. There is none if we are serious in our determination to educate our people in such a way that through their collective assertion of the autonomy of human freedom over the otherwise meaningless drift of history they will secure the future life and enrichment of our culture.